

REVIEW OF THE EIGHTH ASSAY & REFINING CONFERENCE: 17-20 March 2019

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INTRODUCTION

Over 200 delegates from 22 countries were in attendance at LBMA's eighth biennial Assaying and Refining Conference. Once again, it was held at what is now becoming its spiritual home, the Royal Garden Hotel, in Kensington, London. One thing that we learnt is that, popular as it is, there is no appetite for this to become an annual or an international event. Indeed, delegates voted overwhelmingly in favour of retaining its biennial status, perhaps thinking that we could get too much of a good thing.

MAINTAINING STANDARDS

Although this is primarily a technical conference, geared towards laboratory technicians, it was gratifying to see a wider cross-section of delegates, including more central bankers and exchanges in attendance. The key purpose is to gather and share ideas, and hear about the latest developments and initiatives across a raft of issues ranging from assaying, melting, reference materials, security and standards. And where would we all be without standards? Moving away from the standard approach this year, delegates were able to use a new voting tool to answer a range of questions and this interactive approach proved a big hit with all.

REFINING AND SUSTAINABILITY

Proceedings began on Sunday afternoon with a relaxing drinks reception followed by two days of presentations and panel discussions. Two words dominated proceedings - refining and sustainability - with the former voted as the topic delegates were most looking forward to, and so it proved, as they also voted it their favourite session. Jonathan Jodry, Metalor, once again was voted best speaker to go along with his unofficial title of wearer of the best bow tie.

Some highlights included the keynote speech from Professor Mike Mooiman (reproduced on page 26 and well worth a read) who spoke about the challenges of refining in the context of sustainability. 95% of delegates agreed that it should play a part in business practice (who are these 5% who didn't agree?) But it was interesting to note that the voting on the question "Does your company have a sustainability programme?", mirrored exactly the result of the UK referendum with 52% answering no and 48% yes. There was a lot of discussion around the merits of fire assaying versus instrumental techniques, whilst other topics of interest on a packed agenda included how we could deliver improvements to security, integrity and standards.

LAST BUT NOT LEAST

The gala dinner took place in the Bluebird restaurant in Chelsea and proved a great success, with fine food, great company and magicians supplying some spell-binding tricks. I still can't quite believe how that gold ring ended up within a sealed envelope in a zipped compartment within the magician's wallet. The formal conference proceedings were rounded off with drinks in a traditional English pub on the Tuesday evening, where the conversation still revolved around the mesmerising magic that we had seen the previous night.



Last but not least, for those who still had the energy, Professor Mooiman ran a fascinating workshop on the Wednesday about "How to Build a State of the Art Refinery". Other delegates joined one of the two tours organised by LBMA, to Goldsmiths Hall and Inspectorate (Bureau Veritas).

All in all, the conference proved a great success as reflected in the voting, with 88% of delegates saying it was 'good' or 'excellent'. Roll on March 2021.

Presentation slides from the event can be viewed on LBMA's website.

